

MNCs often need support of their home states to mobilize real power. Even in Iran, for example, Mosaddeq had successfully nationalized the oil company. It then took American and British state actions to undo those developments. Similarly, Allende successfully nationalized copper MNCs in Chile. The companies on their own could not stop those moves by the Chilean government. Again, it took covert American actions to overthrow Allende and to undo his moves. So, yes, MNCs are powerful actors but not powerful enough to be agents of informal empire. Establishing informal empire instead requires real force; powerful metropolitan states are thus the main agents driving and maintaining an informal empire.

■ ■ You observe that “hegemony rests not only on domination but also on some legitimacy” and the United States lost “a lot of high moral ground” as a result of its interventions in the developing countries, most notably in regards to the Vietnam War. Can the same case be made about its war projects in the early 21st century?

Yes, I think so but probably not as much as in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. By now the hypocrisy of liberal imperialism is well understood by many. The Vietnam War cost the US heavily in terms of loss of high moral ground. By the time the US intervened, say, in Iraq, many observers – especially those who know their recent history -- did not take seriously American claims that they were doing so with some higher purpose in mind. That type of soft power -- that is a product of legitimacy -- had already been lost.

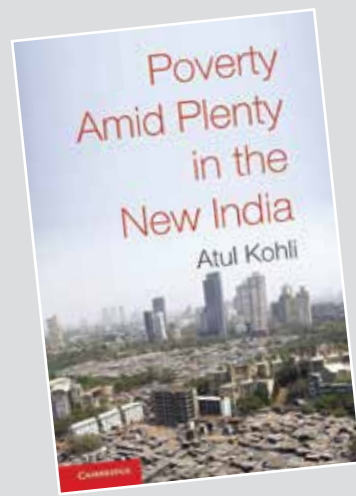
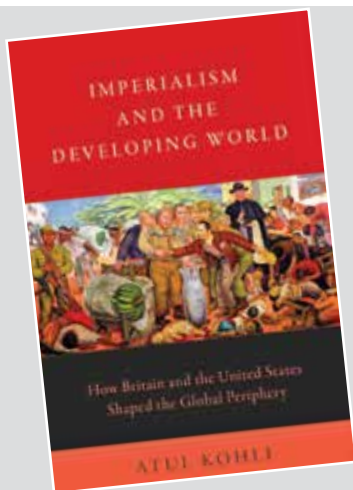
■ ■ Reading your work may give the impression that liberal ideals were primarily sort of empty rhetoric in whose name the US advanced some of its imperial interests throughout the 20th century, especially given the support it gave friendly and “pliable” but utterly undemocratic states. Is that impression correct enough?

One has to be careful as to how much one generalizes. I stand by my argument that American interventions in the developing world often did not follow liberal principles, especially principles of self-determination and support of democratic forces. But there are exceptions. The pattern of US support in rebuilding Western Europe in the post-WWII period can be interpreted as a high point of liberal internationalism.

■ ■ You argue that the “urge to open the economies of other nations, by force if necessary, runs through the long American twentieth century.” At the risk of playing the devil’s advocate, one might point to many theories of modernization, however misinformed they might have been, which maintained that, to put it simply, opening up a country to the free world would inevitably lead to democratization. How do you respond to that?

Yes, there are respectable scholarly arguments that suggest that integrating with the global capitalist economy will help build prosperity and democracy. That is nearly the American creed. I am afraid I do not agree with these claims. No country has ever industrialized successfully without some protection. And, as to modernization theory (a set of ideas that I teach in my classes) the link between prosperity and democracy is, at best, weak.

■ ■ In the cases of Iran and Chile, you dismiss a security-oriented analysis of US intervention as “superficial” and “misleading,” saying that “fighting communism was but an excuse for American interventions.” Rather,



you argue that such interventions were meant to establish the US global hegemony, which you argue should be more accurately called “an informal empire.” In a parallel world without the Red Scare, I wonder, would the US do the same to thwart nationalist governments?

That is a good question. In the final analysis, we really cannot answer that question. There was Red Scare as you say and all we know is what happened during the Red Scare. We can only make intelligent guesses about a world without the Red Scare. That is what I try to do when I examine patterns of American interventions in the early part of the twentieth century as well as following the end of the Cold War. What is noticeable is a persistent tendency to fight poor country nationalism. The US fought Filipino nationalists at the turn of the century, Iranian, Vietnamese and Chilean nationalists during the Cold War, and then confronted Iraqi nationalists in the most recent period. Certainly, the Red Scare cannot explain this long-term trend. That is why I argue that what the US was trying to do was the same as what the British were trying to do earlier, namely, open up the global economy for their own benefit.

■ ■ In your book, you narrate a curious dialogue: When the Shah reclaimed his throne after Mosaddeq was overthrown, Loy W. Henderson, the US ambassador to Iran at the time, recommended an “undemocratic” Iran to the Shah. And in your words, “the Shah hardly needed to be persuaded.” Overthrowing a nationalist government is one thing, but it is another thing to effectively contribute to institutionalizing a tyrannical dictatorship, as the US did with, for example, helping establish the infamous security apparatus of the Shah. In retrospect, they could’ve done the former without committing themselves to the latter. Was the latter a logical extension of the former from the vantage point of the US statesmen at the time?

This again is a good question. For your interest I attach a screen shot of the original archival document from Henderson to the State Department where he reports this conversation with the Shah.



What is interesting is how quickly the discussion of limited democracy turns to the need for military help. What I take from that is that it was clear to both Henderson and the Shah that any elected government in Iran at that time would have maintained oil nationalization. This was not acceptable to the US and Britain. Since nationalistic forces had to be sidelined, democracy had to be sidelined. And hence the need for military build-up within Iran, supported by the US.